Infrastructure, Speed,

and Peripheral Visibility:

A Virilian Reading of Tire dié

Infrastructure as Power Structure

Infrastructure studies has increasingly emphasized that roads, railways, and communication systems are not neutral technical arrangements but material expressions of political order. Infrastructure organizes circulation: of goods, capital, bodies, and time. It produces inclusion and exclusion not through overt prohibition but through differential access to mobility.

In this sense, infrastructure is less a background condition than a governing structure. It determines who moves, how quickly, and under what conditions.

Tire dié foregrounds precisely such a structure. The railway does not merely function as a setting; it is the film's organizing axis. The camera repeatedly frames the train and the tracks as spatial boundaries dividing the mobile from the immobile.

To deepen this interpretation, one may turn to the work of Paul Virilio.

Virilio and Dromology

Virilio's theory of dromology—the logic of speed—argues that modern power is increasingly defined by acceleration. In works such as Speed and Politics, he contends that political authority and military dominance depend upon control of movement and velocity. Modernity, in this account, is not simply industrialization or technological development, but the strategic organization of speed.

For Virilio, speed is not neutral progress. It is hierarchy. Those who control acceleration control space.

Railways, highways, and communication systems compress geography and reorganize territory. They transform distance into time and redefine power relations accordingly.

If we apply this framework to Tire dié, the railway becomes more than national infrastructure—it becomes a dromological apparatus.

The Train as Instrument of Acceleration

The train in Birri's film moves with mechanical precision. It embodies technological momentum and integration into a broader national and economic network. The passengers within it—though largely unseen—are participants in this velocity. They inhabit accelerated space.

By contrast, the children running alongside the tracks are excluded from the apparatus of speed. They must generate movement through physical exertion, yet their motion does not translate into infrastructural mobility. They run beside modernity but cannot enter it.

Virilio argues that modernity produces a “polar inertia”—a condition in which some bodies experience hyper-mobility while others become structurally immobilized. In Tire dié, this polarization is rendered visible. The children are not geographically distant from the train; they are temporally distant from its speed.

Their proximity intensifies exclusion.

Infrastructure as Optical Regime

Virilio also emphasizes the relationship between speed and perception. Acceleration alters what can be seen and how it is seen. Fast movement reduces visibility, compresses detail, and abstracts landscape into blur.

In the film, the moving train contrasts sharply with the grounded camera that records the children’s repetitive pursuit. The passengers inside the train do not perceive the marginal landscape in detail; they pass through it. The camera, however, lingers.

This shift reclaims perceptual authority from speed.

Birri’s documentary method interrupts dromological abstraction. By slowing down the gaze and repositioning the frame at trackside level, the film resists the erasure produced by accelerated transit. It re-materializes what velocity renders invisible.

From an infrastructural perspective, Tire dié becomes an anti-dromological intervention. It does not dismantle speed but exposes its uneven distribution.

The Politics of Peripheral Visibility

Infrastructure promises integration, yet it often produces corridors of privilege surrounded by zones of neglect. The railway connects urban centers while bypassing adjacent communities.

In Virilian terms, modern power operates through strategic lines of movement. Those situated on these lines gain access to circulation; those outside them remain peripheral.

Tire dié stages this condition spatially. The tracks are both connective and divisive. The children's cry—"Tire dié"—functions as a demand to be acknowledged within the regime of circulation. Coins thrown from the train become symbolic fragments of participation in accelerated modernity.

But such participation is precarious and episodic. The underlying structure remains intact.

Conclusion: Cinema Against Speed

Through a Virilian lens, Tire dié reveals infrastructure as a system that governs velocity and visibility. The film does not simply critique poverty; it interrogates the politics of speed embedded in modernization.

By positioning the camera alongside those excluded from the apparatus of acceleration, Birri challenges the assumption that infrastructure equals integration. The railway, often celebrated as a symbol of national unity, emerges as a dromological boundary.

In this reading, the film becomes a meditation on uneven velocity within the Argentine nation. It anticipates later theoretical concerns about mobility, infrastructural citizenship, and the stratification of speed.

Cinema here performs a critical function: it slows perception. It makes visible the bodies that acceleration leaves behind.

References

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso.

Birri, Fernando. 1960. “Tire dié.” Santa Fe: Instituto de Cinematografía, Universidad Nacional del Litoral.

King, John. 1990. Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America. London: Verso.

Larkin, Brian. 2013. “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure.” Annual Review of Anthropology 42: 327–343.

Nichols, Bill. 2017. Introduction to Documentary. 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Rancière, Jacques. 2004. The Politics of Aesthetics. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum.

Virilio, Paul. 1977. Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology. New York: Semiotext(e).

Virilio, Paul. 1988. The Vision Machine. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Virilio, Paul. 1980. The Aesthetics of Disappearance. New York: Semiotext(e).

Author: Tsubomi Choji
Year: 2026
© Tsubomi Choji